



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Saints Simon & Jude (28th October) 2025

The image of the Church as a spiritual temple mentioned in the first reading from the Letter to the Church in Ephesus echoes a similar metaphor in the former Epistle General of Saint Peter. New Testament scholars generally doubt that Saint Peter himself wrote the letters ascribed to him; and are likewise wary of Saint Paul's supposed authorship of the Letter to the Ephesians, all of them seeming to represent a stage of thinking reached rather later than is possible for the life-spans of either Peter or Paul. Rather, they represent, as it were, the "schools of thought" of each man as developed by subsequent generations.

For the Jews of Jesus' day, the notion of the destroyed Temple would have been shocking. For four hundred years or more, Jewish theology had centred on the Temple in Jerusalem and its Liturgy and its destruction was unthinkable. However, as we know, within a couple of generations Jews would have to accommodate the unimaginable.

Although the Old Testament texts portray the design of the Temple as a bespoke commission from God; in fact, peoples of various ancient Near Eastern cultures would probably have found much of it familiar, since there seems to have been a lot of "borrowing" of styles and inspiration in the area.

In all likelihood, the Temple was not aniconic - that is without images of living beings. We suppose that on or around the Ark of the Covenant in a previous iteration of the Temple were images of seraphim - hence the vision of Isaiah wherein he saw these angelic beings calling to each other and then calling him to his prophetic office. Of course, the Ark disappeared after the destruction of the Temple in the sixth century BC, but later iterations of the Temple will have had images of angels, none-the-less.

What was missing, of course, was an image of the God to Whom the Temple was dedicated: an empty space, which denoted the *Shekhinah* - the Presence of God; because in Jewish theology, the Temple was, so to speak, the primary residence of God on earth.

In this, we find the significance of the metaphor of the Church as a spiritual Temple: within the company of Christian people, the Presence of God finds His primary residence. In our association, people must encounter the love, compassion and Truth of God, which flow from His Being.

These are revealed through the spiritual sacrifices that we offer: the good works reflecting the teaching of Christ, all of which are summarised and motivated by the celebration of the Mass, which animates the stones into the living Temple, infusing them with the Presence of the risen Christ.

This shift to finding the divine Presence from the location of the Temple to the company of Christ's pilgrim people reaches into the heart of the Renewed Covenant. It is the essence of what it is to be the Apostolic Church: one which moves amidst the people of earth and brings the divine Presence to them wherever they may be.